YANKEE SAMURAI

AMERICA'S SECRET WEAPON IN WORLD WAR II

The history of Japanese Americans who resolutely served the United States in World War II to bring about the Allied victory over Japan is a magnificent story.

6,000 Nisei (Japanese Americans) served in the U.S. Military Intelligence Service (MIS) during World War II and fought covertly against the land of their ancestry, contributing tremendously to the Allied victory. They were literally, America's superb secret human weapon then, and what they did has been one of the best-kept secrets of the war.

Their role was truly indispensable and unique, for they employed a devastatingly effective weapon, their knowledge of the enemy's complex and difficult language, which very few persons beside them on the Allied side could understand or use. They were superbly resourceful, courageous and loyal soldiers who served without fanfare in all campaigns and all fronts of the far-flung war throughout the Pacific, in China, India and Burma, and even in Europe where they secretly intercepted the enemy's diplomatic communications.

Yet, despite the contributions and sacrifices made by them, their role in that war had to remain an untold military secret all these years until only very recently. It is a remarkable story without parallel.

The Role and Accomplishments of the Nisei Military Intelligence Soldiers

The "Go For Broke" exploits of the Nisei 442nd Infantry Regiment have been well publicized and recognized, and rightfully so, as the unsurpassed combat record of Japanese-Americans who fought as an integral military unit in Italy and France. The MIS story, on the other hand, is one of numerous small units of Nisei soldiers who operated in detachments of ten to twenty men assigned to every combat division, army corp and every campaign in the war against Japan.

It is also the story of much larger groups who served at intelligence centers at army and area headquarters level. Three main intelligence centers were operated, in the Southwest Pacific Area under General Douglas MacArthur, the Central Pacific Ocean Area under Admiral Chester Nimitz, and the China-Burma-India Area (CBI) under General "Vinegar Joe" Stilwell. The largest of these centers was at MacArthur's headquarters and known as ATIS (Allied Translator Interpreter Section), which had as many as 3,000 Nisei at its peak. The other centers were JICPOA (Joint Intelligence Center, Pacific Ocean Area) and SATIC (Southeast Asia Translation and Interrogation Center).

Through it all, as indispensable translators of captured enemy documents, interrogators of enemy POWs and persuaders of enemy surrender, they were superbly effective. They also worked laboriously over tons of enemy documents -- maps, battle plans, diaries, letters, records, manuals -- at area headquarters, producing voluminous intelligence of all sorts that affected Allied strategy and operations. The men of ATIS, for example, produced 20-million pages of translations.

In the Solomon Islands they translated an intercepted enemy radio message which revealed that Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, commander-in-chief of Japan's naval forces, was to arrive at a certain time at Rabaul in a flight of two Betty bombers from Truk. Rabaul was at an extreme flying range of U.S. P-38 fighters, allowing only 15 minutes flight over the target area, but the Admiral's arrival was successfully ambushed and the planes were destroyed. General MacArthur referred to this as the one most singularly significant action of the war.

Prior to U.S. landings in the Philippines in October, 1944, thanks to translation done by MIS men, the Japanese Navy's master plan for defending the Philippines was known to Allied forces. As enemy fleets responded to U.S. landings on Leyte, the U.S. navy was able to thwart the counter attacks and annihilate the enemy forces.

Another major coup was capture and translation in 1944 of the enemy's Z-Plan, the Imperial Navy's strategy for defending the Marianas Islands against the U.S. Navy's carrier forces. As the U.S. invasion of the Marianas (Guam and Saipan) unfolded, Admiral Raymond Spruance's carrier fleet and submarines dealt a death blow to the counter-attacking Japanese carrier forces. The Great Marianas Turkey Shoot resulted, a complete debacle for the enemy. Hundreds of enemy planes were swept from the skies, and Japanese aircraft carriers were never again able to fight the war. The MIS Nisei made all this possible.

On Okinawa in 1945, the last and bloodiest battle of the war, lasting over two months, the enemy's fate was sealed by two vital pieces of intelligence translated by the Nisei. One was the enemy's final main defense plan, issued a month before the U.S. landings, that was captured early in the fighting. It was a brilliant plan which accurately predicted the date and site of the U.S. landings and the strategy of the U.S. forces. The enemy's intentions and strategy were made clear through the translation.

The other was a minutely detailed full contour map of Okinawa, recovered from the body of an enemy artillery observation officer. The U.S. map of the island had been created from B-29 aerial reconnaissance photos, and it was highly inadequate, with most the inland terrain only roughly shown and with many blank areas. The enemy map was translated overnight on an overlay, flown to Pearl Harbor for reproduction, and 72 hours later 12,000 copies were delivered back to Okinawa and distributed to all units. From then on it guided all the U.S. ground action and artillery fire.

Maj. General Charles Willoughby, G-2, intelligence chief of MacArthur's command, unequivocally stated, "The Nisei saved countless Allied lives and shortened the war by two years."

General MacArthur was able to state with pride, "Never in military history did an army know so much about the enemy prior to actual engagement."

Major General Frank D. Merrill in Burma said, "As for the value of the Nisei, I couldn't have gotten along without them." And he ordered his men, Merrill's Marauders, to protect with their lives the 14-man team of MIS Nisei under his command.

From the frozen tundra of Attu, to the coral atolls of the Pacific, the jungles of New Guinea, the Philippines and Burma, the lava terrain of Iwo Jima and the bloodied escarpments of Okinawa, the Nisei were everywhere, obtaining intelligence from enemy documents, POWs and enemy communications, and calling upon the enemy to surrender. When needed they operated behing enemy lines and parachuted on assignments without real parachute training. In Burma and elsewhere they crept to within hearing distance of enemy troops to learn their movements, at times tapping and listening to the enemy's telephone communications.

Although they were not trained MIS men, early in the war three Nisei, Arthur Komori, Thomas Sakakida and Clarence Yamagata operated secretly with U.S. Army Intelligence before the Philippines fell to the invading Japanese. Two were evacuated from Corregidor in the nick of time by light plane, avoiding capture by the enemy. There was no room on the plane for the third, Sakakida, who was captured and tortured, after he interpreted for General Jonathan Wainright in the surrender of Corregidor. The enemy "converted" him to their use as a spy, but he fooled them and operated as a double agent, feeding intelligence to Filipino guerrillas which wound up at MacArthur's headquarters. These three men could be called the forerunners of the fantastic MIS operations that followed later.

Sergeant Kenji Yasui swam the Irawaddy River in Burma to an island held by enemy troops, and pretending to be a Japanese officer, commanded them to surrender. Barking orders like a genuine officer, he assembled them and put them through a close order drill as he did so. Of 17 men, three had to be killed by supporting GIs, and one committed suicide with a grenade, trying to take Yasui with him, but 13 surrendered, and Yasui had them push him on a raft to U.S. troops waiting on the river bank. He was aptly named, "The Little Sergeant York" and was awarded the Silver Star.

On Saipan, following the enemy's final demonic and suicidal Banzai attack, Sergeant Bob Hoichi Kubo entered a large cave with only a .45 pistol, laid it down before eight enemy soldiers and palavered with them for two hours, even eating a meal with them, and succeeded in getting them to surrender, along with 122 civilians. The enemy was about to kill him at first, but were smitten by his boldness. Kubo was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his unbelievably courageous feat.

In Burma with the Merrill's Marauders, Sergeant Roy Matsumoto crept to within yards of an enemy unit preparing to attack, learned what they were about to do and exactly when they would, then crawled back to the Marauders and enabled a trap to be set. As the enemy moved into position to attack, he shouted in Japanese the order to charge, to which they dutifully responded, attacking prematurely. When the action ended, 54 enemy were dead, with no casualties to the GI's. He was awarded the Legion of Merit.

On Iwo Jima, Corporal Terry Takeshi Doi earned the nickname "Guts Doi" by volunteering to flush the enemy from their caves. Armed with only a flashlight and a knife, and stripped to the waist to show he had no gun, he approached and crawled through cave after cave, urging the enemy to surrender. He brought them out, one to three at a time, and even up to a dozen. His courage was incredible, and he was awarded the Silver Star.

The heroic and resourceful actions of the MIS Nisei were simply myriad. As the war progressed closer to Japan, they further performed an unequalled, compassionate role on Saipan and Okinawa, saving the lives of thousands upon thousands of non-combatant enemy civilians by flushing them from caves, often at the risk of their own lives.

Some were killed in action, in New Guinea, Leyte, Luzon and Okinawa. The names of three of them, Sergeants Frank Hachiya of Oregon, George Nakamura of California and Yukitaka Mizutari of Hawaii, appear on three major buildings named after them at the Defense Language Institute in Monterey. Mits Shibata died on Ie Shima, near Okinawa, shot in error by a BAR-wielding GI as he sought to rescue some civilians. Eddie Fukui perished in a kamikaze attack on his ship at the Kerama Islands off Okinawa as he intercepted enemy radio communications. Bill Imoto, Shoichi Nakahara and Satoshi Kurokawa are others who died in different places. And over twenty ATIS men were killed in a plane crash on Okinawa. Their names were Japanese, but they all served and died as American soldiers.

As General "Vinegar Joe" Stilwell said, "The Nisei bought an awfully big hunk of America with their blood."

Reviewing the exploits of the MIS men, Major General Clayton Bissell, Chief of the Military Intelligence Division of the War Department, told a graduating MIS class: "If you Japanese-Americans are ever questioned as to your loyalty, don't even bother to reply...Your gallant deeds under fire will speak so loudly that you need not answer."

When the war ended in August of 1945, their work was not over, for now they were needed to bridge the language gap in the Allied Occupation of Japan. This they did, performing again an indispensable role.

Most of them were volunteers. Many were Kibei, or "returnees to America," who had been sent to Japan by their parents to be educated there before the war. Not all were bilingually expert, for the Japanese language was exceedingly hard to learn and use. But they teamed up with the Kibei whose Japanese was stronger to do their job.

At home in the U.S., many of their families were in relocation centers, behind barbed wire and guarded by armed soldiers, since all persons of Japanese ancestry had been evacuated from the West Coast in 1942 by the U.S. government and placed in these camps in isolated locations. Yet, they responded to the Army's call for volunteers for MIS duty.

Like the Nisei who served with the 442nd Regiment in Europe, these MIS Nisei fought two wars -- one against the military enemy and the other against racial prejudice and distrust toward their kind at home. By fighting the first, they would overcome the other.

The first MIS language school

Surprisingly, even before Pearl Harbor in the summer of 1941, several U.S. Army officers, with admirable prescience and faith in the loyalty of the Nisei, set about establishing a secret school to train them in military intelligence. These officers, including John Weckerling and Kai E. Rasmussen, had been American military attaches in Japan in the 30's and were acquainted with the difficulty of mastering the Japanese language. They foresaw a dire need for American soldiers capable of deciphering the language in the event of war with Japan.

The officers succeeded in obtaining the War Department's approval to proceed, and with a meager budget of $2,000 for supplies, they launched the school on November 1 in a small hangar, which still stands today, at Crissy Field in the Presidio. There were four civilian Nisei instructors and 60 students (58 Nisei and 2 Caucasians) assembled from various army units. Teaching materials had to be developed, and the first seats were orange crates. A special military language dictionary in Japanese and English had to be created, all hand-written.

From this sparse beginning, when war came the school was rapidly expanded as the need and demand for its graduates mushroomed. The total relocation of Japanese persons from the West Coast in June, 1942, and the rampant war hysteria and racial hate prevailing there, also caused the school to be moved at that time to racially more hospitable Minnesota -- to Camp Savage, a former Civil Conservation Corps log-cabin camp 20 miles south of Minneapolis. There the school underwent great expansion as combat units in the Pacific demanded more and more MIS soldiers. In 1944 the school was moved to more comfortable quarters at Fort Snelling in St. Paul.

By the war's end, the school had trained and sent afield 6,000 men. Then after the war it was moved back to the West Coast in 1946, to the Presidio of Monterey, where it became the now permanent and extensive U.S. Defense Language Institute, which has trained through the years since then more than 70,000 valuable military linguists in various strategic languages.

The Presidio Army Museum

The Presidio Army Museum

GO FOR BROKE

An exhibit honoring the Japanese American 100th Infantry Battalion and the 442nd Regimental Combat Team—the "most decorated unit of World War II . . ."

1. This is the story of Americans of Japanese ancestry who fought in World War II against the armies of the Third Reich. It is the story of the 100th Infantry Battalion and the 442nd Regimental Combat Team and their phoenix-like emergence from the ashes of suspicion and fear to an almost unparalleled position of honor and regard.

The opening chapter of this began with the formation of the 100th Infantry Battalion. Early in 1942, there were many Japanese Americans already in the army in Hawaii. A number of them were serving with the 298th and 299th Regiments of the Hawaiian National Guard stationed at Schofield Barracks, Honolulu. Soon after the attack on Pearl Harbor, their loyalty was in question. They were disarmed and assigned to menial labor. The Hawaiian community requested that a Japanese American unit be formed from these trained men. The Army responded by creating a battalion of Americans of Japanese ancestry—this was the beginning of the 100th Infantry Battalion.

In June 1942, this group of 1300 men arrived at Camp McCoy, Wisconsin, and was officially christened the 100th Infantry Battalion and attached to the Second Army. Shortly after their arrival, approximately 100 men were detached and assigned to the Military Intelligence School (MIS) at Camp Savage, Minnesota. In February 1943, the 100th Infantry Battalion was transferred to Camp Shelby, Mississippi, to participate in maneuvers in Mississippi and Louisiana and to undergo large-unit training before deployment for combat. Their training record was so superb that the 442nd Regimental Combat Team was activated on February 1, 1943. A call then went out for Americans of Japanese ancestry to volunteer for service as a demonstration of their loyalty. More than 3000 men from Hawaii and 1500 men from the mainland responded to this call. Many of the mainland volunteers who came forth to serve had families that were being unjustly held in internment centers, behind barbed wire fences.

During the summer of 1943, the 100th and their new "baby brother," the 442nd, met briefly at Camp Shelby. The Army was still seeking answers to the question: how would American soldiers of Japanese ancestry acquit themselves in combat?

Numbers refer to exhibit areas in the Presidio Army Museum.

"They were superb! The men of the 442nd took terrific casualties. They showed rare courage and tremendous fighting spirit . . . everybody wanted them."
—Gen. George C. Marshall

2. In an attempt to find some answers, the 100th Infantry Battalion was sent overseas on August 11, 1943. They arrived in Oran, North Africa, and were attached to the renowned "Red Bull" 34th Division. On September 19, 1943, the 100th landed on the beaches of Salerno, Italy. They engaged in their first firefight at Montemarano on the 28th. This was followed by fierce fighting at three separate crossings of the Rapido River. There was further action at Volturno and Cassino and at the final breakout from the Anzio beachhead. During these battles, the 100th met every military objective. They overcame enemy minefields, tanks, and railway artillery. They made bayonet charges, fought off countless counterattacks, and held the high ground. Their ferocity in action and their determination to win against all odds led to their having such high casualties that they earned the name of the "Purple Heart Batallion."

This fame was dearly won, and over 1000 Purple Hearts were awarded during this period. Major James Gillespie, the commander of the 100th stated: "They call themselves just plain Americans . . . they have earned the right . . . Anybody who calls these doughboys "Jap" is the most narrow minded person I know of. They are just as American as I am." The men of the 100th had proved that the loyalty of the U.S. soldiers of Japanese American ancestry was beyond question.

The superb combat record of the 100th plus an excellent training record led to the decision to send the 442nd into action overseas. The first battalion was left in Camp Shelby to serve as a replacement unit. On June 10, north of Rome, the 100th was attached to the 442nd. Thus the final 442nd Regimental Combat Team consisted of the 100th Infantry Battalion, the Second and Third Battalions, the 522nd Field Artillery Battalion, the 232nd Engineering Company, the 206th Army Band, an Anti-Tank Company, a Cannon Company, and a Service Company.

The 442nd first engaged the enemy on June 26, 1944. This was followed by one battle after another until the end of the war, leading to a total of five major campaigns. The 442nd's efficiency and fighting ability quickly approached that of its precursor, the famed 100th Infantry "Purple Heart" Battalion. In the early phases of fighting, the 442nd was instrumental in the capture of Livorno, Italy, and in pushing the German Army north of the Arno River. In August, 1944, the 442nd's Anti-Tank Company took part in Operation Anvil (campaign of Southern France). Meanwhile, back in Italy, the 442nd established positions just beyond the Arno River. They left these positions to rejoin their Anti-Tank Company in France.

3. Reconstituted, the 442nd Regimental Combat Team moved up the Rhone valley in "40 and 8's" to Epinal where they were attached to the 36th Division. Almost immediately thereafter they were pressed into action. After three days of bitter fighting, the 442nd liberated the French town of Bruyeres on October 18, 1944. After the fall of Bruyeres, the 442nd fought on to secure the high ground beyond the town. They were relieved on October 23 for a rest—but not for long. On October 27, 1944, they received orders to break the German ring that surrounded the "Lost Battalion" of the 141st Regiment, 36th Division. The "Lost Battalion" had been isolated for almost a week and was low on food and ammunition—the 442nd was ordered to reach them at any cost. They moved into action, and during the next four days, they engaged in the bloodiest and fiercest fighting ever undertaken by the 442nd. The men fought from tree-to-tree, against hidden machine-gun nests and tank-supported infantry. They drove through schrapnel-filled barrages of mortar and artillery fire and

crossed minefields and booby traps. They never stopped in their determined drive to reach the entrapped battalion. At the end of this action, more than 200 men of the 442nd were dead. In addition, 600 men were wounded, the total number of casualties exceeded the number of men saved, but the 442nd had fought through and rescued the "Lost Battalion."

After this battle, General Dahlquist of the 36th asked the men of the 442nd Regiment to be assembled so that he could thank them personally. When he saw only several hundred men (out of the usual regimental complement of 4500), he asked the 442nd Commander, Colonel Charles W. Pence, "Where are the rest of the men?" Pence tearfully replied, "You're looking at the entire regiment . . . that's all that's left."

At the beginning of this action, Company K had started with some 200 riflemen, but had 17 men left when the "Lost Battalion" was reached. I Company had only 8 men left. Both companies lost all their officers and noncoms ran the companies for the last few days of action. All the other companies had suffered similar losses.

"These are some of the best goddamn fighters in the U.S. Army. If you have more, send them over!"
—Gen. Mark W. Clark

4. This mission was successful but personnel and materiel had been severely depleted. The 442nd was relieved on November 8th and sent to southern France to guard the French-Italian border. This was officially labelled the North Apennines Campaign, the men of the 442nd called it the "Champagne Campaign." During this assignment, the 442nd was brought back to life with replacements of men and a fresh supply of materiel.

5. At General Mark Clark's personal request to General Dwight Eisenhower, the 442nd was returned to Italy in March, 1945. Their new assignment was to create a diversionary action on the western anchor of the Gothic Line. This sector had defied Allied assault for over five months. The enemy had had ample time to fortify their position, and the line appeared to be impregnable. Frontal assault was impossible—the enemy's guns were in complete control. The only solution was to conduct a surprise attack by going up over a nearly vertical mountainside. On April 5, the 442nd started their approach. During the dark hours before dawn, the men of the 442nd and the 100th climbed for hours in tense silence. They finally reached the top of the ridge and moved into position for the attack. In the next 32 fantastic minutes, the men took two key mountaintop enemy outposts. With this break in their line, the other enemy positions fell one by one. What started out as a diversionary attack by the 442nd and the 100th soon developed into a major rout that destroyed the enemy's western section. The Gothic Line that had withstood assault for six months was finally broken!

By April 30, 1945, the men of the 442nd had breached practically every position held by the enemy and they were the first Allied troops to reach Turin. They were in complete control of the western sector and the enemy was surrendering in greater and greater numbers. Finally on May 2 the Third Reich surrendered and the war was over.

As reported in the Congressional Record by General Jacob L. Devers, Chief of the Army Ground Forces ". . . the 100th and the 442nd suffered 9,486 casualties, including 650 soldiers who were killed in action. The total number of casualties was more than twice the assigned complement of men in the unit." In spite of this, during its intense military missions, the Beachhead News reported, "The 442nd . . . never gave ground, never took a backward step."

6. In less than two years, the 100th Infantry Battalion and the 442nd Combat Team had successfully fought in seven major military campaigns: Naples-Foggia Campaign; the Rome-Arno; Southern France (Operation Anvil); the Rhineland; the North Apennines; Central Europe Campaign; and the Po Valley. The Congressional Record reported that they had received, among other awards and citations, ". . . a Congressional Medal of Honor; 52 Distinguished Service Crosses; 1 Distinguished Service Medal; 560 Silver Stars plus 28 Oak Leaf Clusters; 22 Legions of Merit; 15 Soldiers Medals; 4000 Bronze Stars with 1200 Oak Leaf Clusters; 9486 Purple Hearts; 7 Presidential Distinguished Unit Citations; 2 Meritorious Unit Service Plaques; 36 Army Commendations; 87 Division Commendations; 18 decorations from allied nations; and a special plaque of appreciation from the men of the "Lost Battalion." Several years after the war, Governor John Connolly of Texas issued a proclamation officially making all former members of the 442nd, "honorary Texans." Altogether there were 18,143 individual decorations for valor, thus making the 100th and the 442nd Regimental Combat Team "the most decorated unit for its size and length of service in the history of the United States."

"Thank you for telling and showing the real story of the accomplishments and sacrifices of the 100/442 Regimental Combat Team. I am proud of what these Americans have done in spite of the prejudices and obstacles confronting them. They were truly the noblest of us all"

Mike Mansfield
U.S. Ambassador to Japan

As President Harry S. Truman pinned the final Presidential Unit Citation to the 442nd colors, he said ". . . I can't tell you how much I appreciate the privilege of being able to show you just how much the United States thinks of what you have done . . . You fought not only the enemy but you fought prejudice—and you won."

The Presidio Army Museum